

The history of Grassy Hill

The 1,295-acre preserve was dedicated in 1999 to protect rare plants and natural communities found on Grassy Hill. The property was acquired through a charitable sale from Charles Carter Lee and a generous gift from Alice Lee Melchor in honor of their parents, Dr. Henry Lee and Dr. Elizabeth Lewis Saunders Lee. The Nature Conservancy helped establish the preserve, and the preserve was funded by the 1992 Parks and Natural Areas Bond.

The Grassy Hill Hiking Trail System results from a partnership between the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Franklin County Parks and Recreation Department, the Franklin County Family YMCA, the Franklin County School Board, the Town of Rocky Mount, the Roanoke Appalachian Trail Club and the Pathfinders for Roanoke Valley Greenways. Most of the funding to build the trail system came from a Virginia Recreational Trails Fund grant.

Natural History

The ancient rocks that make up Grassy Hill are rich in magnesium and other base minerals that weather to form what are called mafic soils. The combination of mafic soils and dry, rocky conditions at Grassy Hill provide habitat for rare plant species.

Grassy Hill once had more open, grassy habitat. The droughty soils of Grassy Hill and periodic fires are thought to have created more open woodlands with scattered prairie-like openings on Grassy Hill before settlement of the region. Most of Grassy Hill is dominated today by oak-hickory forest. White, black, northern red, post, chestnut, and blackjack oaks along with pignut hickories dominate the woodland canopy.

Scattered along the ridge line and slopes are old-age oaks and hickories that avoided logging. Century old and older trees on Grassy Hill typically have an open-grown form with widespread limbs that is a testament to the former savanna-like conditions of the area.

Wildlife commonly seen or heard includes wild turkey, a variety of woodpeckers, white-breasted nuthatch, tufted titmouse, gray squirrel, American toad and box turtle.

Directions

From the intersection of US 220 South and State Route 419 (Electric Avenue) in Roanoke, go south on US 220 towards Rocky Mount. Pass the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance at 1.8 miles. At 18.6 miles exit US 220 South at the first Rocky Mount exit. Go 0.7 miles south on Business US 220 (North Main Street), passing through one stop-light. Turn right (west) onto Technology Drive and go 0.1 miles downhill to the trailhead kiosk on the right (north) side of Technology Drive.

Parking is available in the adjacent Franklin County Family YMCA lot or the Franklin County School District’s Gereau Center for Applied Technology and Career Enhancement parking lot after school hours.

About Natural Area Preserves

A natural area preserve is land or water that has been provided strong legal protection against activities that might harm the rare plants, animals and natural communities found there.

Since 1989, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has dedicated 46 natural area preserves, protecting more than 40,000 acres. New preserves continue to be added.

Natural area preserves are closely observed and managed to benefit the rare species and natural communities found there. Management may include prescribed burning, control of invasive species and habitat restoration. Where appropriate, visitor access is provided.

Join us in the preserves – DCR’s Volunteer Program

Volunteers are needed for Grassy Hill and other natural area preserves throughout the state. Please contact DCR’s natural heritage staff for more information, (804) 786-7951.



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VIRGINIA

Department of Conservation and Recreation’s

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Grassy Hill Natural Area Preserve Hiking Trail Guide










Rocky Mount, Virginia

Conserving Virginia’s biodiversity
through inventory, protection
and stewardship.

Welcome to the Grassy Hill
Natural Area Preserve Hiking Trails!

Hikers can trek up to 6.6 miles on the Grassy Hill Hiking Trail System that starts at the base in Rocky Mount, Va., and climbs to the ridge line with two trail loops along the ridge top and side slopes. Most of the trail system is in the Grassy Hill Natural Area Preserve, a 1,295-acre site owned and managed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Nearly three miles of Grassy Hill that forms the northern backdrop to Rocky Mount are protected in the preserve.

Compatible uses for the preserve include hiking, nature study and photography. Horseback riding, off-road vehicles, bikes, and collecting plants, animals and rocks are prohibited.

- **Rules**
Please stay on the designated trails.
- Foot traffic only. No bikes, horses or motor vehicles allowed.
- Please pack all litter and garbage out with you.
- Fires are prohibited.
- Camping is not permitted.
- Pets are permitted but must be kept on a leash at all times.
- Removal, collection or destruction of plants, animals and minerals is prohibited.
- Hunting and trapping are prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

Grassy Hill Natural Area Preserve Hiking Trail System

